

## Review of the Playing Field Project

### 1. Historical background

A Referendum on Parish Planning Policy was carried out in 1991 (p.54/2; p.61-62; p.71-76 refer). In response to the open question *Would you like to see any new or improved facilities in Carlton?* 22% of respondents said they would like a playground, playing field or sports field, compared with 14% who would like a village hall or community centre. This was a significant response to an open question. In the same survey 23% of respondents said they would be prepared to pay up to £5 pa more in Council Tax to pay for a playing field. At that time the Band D Council tax was £16 pa, so this would have represented a 31% rise.

In September 1991 a petition signed by 67 parishioners requested the installation of children's play equipment on the West Green. This request was refused on the grounds of expense and that the land was a registered village green, but "it was resolved that the PC would seek a suitable site for a children's play area" (p.66/3;81/3 refer).

In 1992, as part of the Ashby Canal project, H&BBC attempted to acquire 2 acres of land next to Carlton Bridge for use as a low key amenity area, but the landowner refused to consider a sale (p.157/23 refers).

In February 1997 a petition signed by 65 parishioners requested the installation of a football goal on the West Green. It was decided that a permanent fixture was not appropriate, but permission was granted for the use of a temporary goal which was stored at the back of Old School Cottage (p.504/4 refers). This petition, and the one in 1991, were both organised and presented by young parishioners.

In August 1999 the occupier of Old School Cottage requested that a children's play area be provided because of the continued nuisance of balls being lost in the garden and on the roof of the property and in neighbouring gardens. At that time there were wrought iron railings with spikes along the eastern boundary and there was concern that boys were climbing on this fence to recover balls from the adjacent flat roof.

It was recognised that the East and West Greens were not safe places for young people to play, and that the increased number of children in the village was putting pressure on this small area (p.646/5 refers). It was resolved that a confidential review of potential sites for a playing field be prepared, and this was considered at a later meeting (p.662/15 refers). Out of 20 potential sites, 5 merited detailed investigation.

More detailed Parish Plans were carried out in 2001, 2011 and 2021, with separate questionnaires for young people and adults (PC website: <https://www.carltonpc.co.uk/parishplan.php>). These showed consistent strong support for the acquisition of land for a playing field, and for other uses including a playground, sports pavilion, village events, picnics, dog walking, informal recreation and a nature reserve.

In 2015 the Diamond Jubilee Orchard was created in conjunction with the construction of Northfields. This area is subject to a s106 agreement and is not suitable for ball games, so it was developed as a wildlife refuge and informal open space and Toddlers Play Area.

The PC adopted a Green Space Strategy in 2006, which was reviewed and updated in 2016 (p.1116/7b, 1606/5, 1614/7, Report 2016-08 refer). The objectives of the Strategy are “to maintain and enhance public open spaces in the Parish of Carlton, to create new open spaces where appropriate, and to maintain and improve public access to the countryside.” The potential projects listed include the “acquisition of freehold land for play space for young people, informal public open space, sports pitches, and potential site for community and/or club facilities and associated car parking.”

Between 1999 and 2025 confidential discussions have taken place with seven different landowners concerning four potential sites. Some of these discussions have been protracted, but none has resulted in a firm proposal.

The PC will hold a public meeting to discuss any firm proposal before any binding commitments are entered into, but as things stand there is nothing to report.

## **2. Specification**

A new playing field should not be sited immediately behind existing residential properties, and should have reasonable pedestrian access from the core of the village, and a vehicular access for grounds maintenance.

In terms of size, the area required for a cricket field or football pitch offers a useful starting point. A cricket field need not be circular, but usually has a diameter of less than 500 feet, implying a maximum area of 21,740 square yards or 4.5 acres.

The Football Association Handbook specifies that a football pitch must be between 100 and 130 yards long by 50 to 100 yards wide - an area of between 7700 and 9600 square yards or between 1.59 and 1.98 acres. Rugby pitches are a similar size.

The sizes above are maximum, but allowing for space around the playing area, screening, and an access track, small car park and possibly a pavilion of some kind, an area of at least 3 and preferably 5 acres will be required. A larger area could accommodate a wider range of uses and would offer more flexibility in the long term.

## **3. Finance**

Between 1991 and 2002 the resources of the Parish Council (PC) were devoted to providing basic infrastructure such as a bus shelter, pavements and street lighting. A general contingency reserve was built up from zero in 1992-3 to £2000 in 1997-98.

In 2002 (p.857/13) it was resolved “that the PCs long term intentions be made explicit by the allocation of specific capital sums for ... the purchase of recreational land...”, and the approved budget for 2003-4 included a Recreational land reserve of £7,767. Regular allocations have been made to this fund, which now has a balance of £40,825 (Report 2025-05).

Agricultural land in this area is currently valued at £15-20k per acre, though sites adjoining the settlement boundary have a higher ‘hope value’ because of the long term possibility of residential development. Grants are available for the purchase of land for public amenity, and the PC is eligible to borrow money on favourable terms from the Public Works Loan Board. With public support, local fundraising and donations could raise a significant sum of money.

Grounds maintenance is not cheap, but the ongoing costs are likely be of the same order of magnitude as the annual allocations made to the recreational land reserve fund. It might be possible to rent a pitch or part of the site to a local sporting organisation, or enter into a partnership agreement.

The building blocks for the purchase of a suitable parcel of land are now in place, but detailed financial calculations cannot be made until a firm proposal has been tabled. All financial transactions will be published as part of the PCs normal accounting processes.

#### **4. Recommendations**

In the words of the 2021 Parish Plan, the PC should continue to “seek to acquire land for a playing field, public open space and/or nature reserve”.

The Chairman and Clerk should be authorised to open discussions with or make approaches to any local owners of land with potential for use as a playing field.

C J Peat  
Parish Clerk  
30<sup>th</sup> April 2025